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This document was modified last on Sep 10, 2003 - 11:58:04 PDT.

Police resource center helps make Mount Vernon neighborhood safer

BY MARTA MURVOSH

Police producing newsletter for Kulshan Creek residents
MOUNT VERNON — If a cop hands you a paper in the Kulshan Creek neighborhood, chances are it is newsletter, not a ticket.

That's how neighborhood resident Francisco Ocampo got his copy of the neighborhood's first newsletter. A police officer, carrying a bunch of copies, walked up to him.

Written in Spanish and English, the first edition of the quarterly newsletter highlighted various neighborhood services and events as well as listed crime prevention tips.

Ocampo paused while tuning up his car Tuesday to discuss the newsletter, which was distributed this week and last.



Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald
Lillana Esquivel, who lives in the Cascade West Apartments, says the Kulshan Creek neighborhood seems safer and cleaner since the Mount Vernon Police Department opened its resource station. She also says the newsletter being published by police is good for the Kulshan Creek neighborhood.

"It will help the community to keep it clean," said Ocampo, who speaks both Spanish and English. "There won't be so many broken windows in cars."

The six-page newsletter printed on newsprint is the latest effort by the Mount Vernon Police Department to prevent crime and create a sense of community in a neighborhood once considered one of the city's most crime-ridden areas. The newsletter is another service of the police department's Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Resource Station, which opened in 1998.

About 5,000 copies will be distributed to the residents of the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood, roughly outlined by College Way, Kulshan Avenue, LaVenture and 30th streets, and of the apartments on Stanford Drive. The area has a high concentration of Spanish-speaking residents.

Several parents, contacted while seeing their children onto an afternoon kindergarten bus Tuesday, said their families can use the newsletter to locate needed services.

"It is information that helps the community," said resident Enrique Lopez through a translator.

Most of the articles were written by Jon Gerondale, who is the police officer assigned to the neighborhood. So far, reception to the newsletter has been positive, Gerondale said.

"I'm trying to get feedback," he said. "I want the neighborhood to come up with issues and topics ... or have folks write articles." The newsletter cost \$1,200, of which \$1,100 was donated by the management of two area apartment complexes. The police department contributed the remaining \$100.

Editors of *Al Dia*, a local Spanish-language newspaper, provided the translations and layout. The next edition will be in December.

Gerondale said he hopes the newsletter will become another tool to help unite the community.

The neighborhood station offers English classes and a community computer lab.

As the crime rate has dropped in the neighborhood over the past several years, residents have become more inclined to report graffiti, burglarized cars and people acting suspiciously.

That's great news for police, who say they would rather deal with problems such as loitering than have to handle something more serious such as a street fight.

Most important, neighborhood residents have noticed a difference, too.

"Before it was dirty, with cars with broken windows and everything," said Liliana Esquivel. "And now it is getting better."

Marta Murvosh can be reached at 360-416-2149 or by e-mail at mmurvosh@skagitvalleyherald.com

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